

Eye on Health

Seniors: Make Eye Care Part Of Your Wellness Routine

(NAPSA)—Regular checkups at the doctor's office are a familiar routine for most people: blood pressure checks, blood tests and health history questions. There's something else you should know, however: Your overall health can affect your eyes.

This is why ophthalmologists—physicians who specialize in medical and surgical eye care—urge people to take a similar wellness approach when it comes to the health of their eyes.

By age 65, one in three Americans has some form of age-related, vision-limiting eye disease such as glaucoma or macular degeneration.

The good news is, treating these conditions can slow or prevent vision loss. The key to a diagnosis is a medical eye examination by an ophthalmologist who can help keep your eyes functioning well throughout your life. In general, the American Academy of Ophthalmology recommends that people age 65 or older get a comprehensive medical eye exam every one to two years, regardless of whether they experience any symptoms.

Eye Exam or Glaucoma Exam Often At No Cost

The American Academy of Ophthalmology's unique EyeCare America program helps medically underserved seniors access sight-saving eye care. The program offers two services: a comprehensive medical eye exam for eligible seniors and a glaucoma exam for individuals who are determined to be at increased risk based on their age, race and glaucoma family history. Each service has slightly different eligibility requirements.

Under the Seniors program, those eligible will be matched with a nearby volunteer ophthalmologist who will provide a medical eye exam and up to one year of follow-up care for any disease diagnosed at the initial exam, often at no out-of-pocket cost.

To be eligible for the Seniors program, you must:



It's wise to have your eyes checked every year or two, especially after age 65.

- Be a U.S. citizen or legal resident
- Be age 65 or older
- Not belong to an HMO or have eye care benefits through the VA
- Have not seen an ophthalmologist in three or more years.

The Glaucoma program provides a glaucoma eye exam at no cost to those who are eligible and uninsured.

Glaucoma testing is especially important because the condition can sneak up on you, worsening over time without symptoms. Glaucoma is the leading cause of blindness in people over age 60. The condition can respond well to treatment, especially when diagnosed early.

To be eligible for the Glaucoma program, you must:

- Be a U.S. citizen or legal resident
- Not belong to an HMO or have eye care benefits through the VA
- Have not had an eye exam in 12 months or more
- Be at increased risk for glaucoma, determined by age, race and family history of glaucoma.

To learn more about EyeCare America's Seniors and Glaucoma programs and to find out if you or a loved one is eligible, visit EyeCare America at www.aao.org/eyecareamerica.

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